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CII\Hersh

Memo to Sy Hersh, 5 October, 1987, Tuesday: starts with transcriptions of my hand-written notes of 1964 on two transcriptions of telephone calls involving Secretary Rusk in 1962, available to me in my study of "Crisis Communications" in 1964. Following are my comments today on these conversations, partly informed by having read, just last night, U Thant's account in his "View From the UN" memoir of the discussions in Havana being described in these calls to Rusk from Stevenson and from Ball.

Stevenson - Sec. 10/31/62

Sov. Ambassador [to Havana] told U Thant:

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Castro is frustrated, intense, psychotic...

Rikhye...please lay off the recon till Friday. After that you will find they have bulldozed all of the sites.

11/1/62 Ball - Sec.

Castro talked as though he had all the anti-aircraft and he did boast that it was the Cubans who had shot down Major Anderson. Rihyke himself is not at all persuaded that this was just only boastfulness on his part.

He feels that there is a state of very definite kind of hysteria down there at the moment; that they are probably going to be looking for flights today, and that they are going to throw everything that they have. After Castro makes his speech he thinks that if we could delay until tomorrow that the chances of getting into any real trouble are considerably diminished, particularly if we change the flight patterns.

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Rihyke said on a Security Council meeting that Castro would ask him to hold the meeting off till after the 6th...

Sec.: Why the 6th!

Ball: Why, our elections.

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Ellsberg Notes, 5 October 1987

U Thant's memoirs, View from the U.N., pp. 185-186, make clear that the first phone call is a report of a meeting held in Havana at 7:45 PM, Tuesday October 30, 1962. (UThant and his military aide, Brig. Gen. Indar Jit Rikhye, had arrived in Havana about 1:15 PM and had had a first meeting with Castro and other officials from 3 to about 7 PM.)

The meeting described here took place in U Thant's quarters before dinner at the request of the Soviet Ambassador to Cuba, who brought along the Soviet General in charge of all Soviet missile forces in Cuba. U Thant does not identify him, but from other sources, but from other sources, this must have been Col. Gen. of Aviation Viktor Davidkov. It was to Davidkov that Mal'tsev, Commander of the Banes base, reported on the morning of October 27 on the attack and counterattack at the Los Angeles SAM site.

The first paragraph in Stevenson's telephone conversation with Rusk, headed "Soviet Ambassador told U Thant", follows closely U Thant's account of what he was told by the Soviet general in the presence of the "very young" Soviet ambassador to Cuba. So what follows is presumably likewise information from the general. It involves three crucial points that are not included in U Thant's account of this meeting in his memoir:

- (1) that the Cubans had not been trained to fly the IL-28's
- (2) that any equipment Soviet-manned would go: but that "all the A-A, both SAM and conventional, is manned by Cubans."
- (3) it was a Cuban colonel who shot down the U-2

Point 3 is reported in U Thant's memoir as coming directly from Castro to U Thant in the meeting the following day, October 31: "He explained the U-2 had been brought down by Cuban anti-aircraft guns, manned only by Cubans, and that the airman fell

with the plane and died instantly." (p. 188)

This second meeting is clearly the basis of the second phone call from Ball to Sec. Rusk on November 1, 1962; presumably Rikhye, who was quoted, debriefed Ball after his return with U Thant to New York and the U.N. in the afternoon of October 31.

There are two extraordinary assertions in these two conversations, quite aside from the assertion by both Castro and the Soviet general in charge of missile forces, speaking only four days after the event directly to U Thant, that it was Cubans rather than Russians who shot down the U-2. First, there is Davidkov's statement that Cubans were manning the SAM's as of October 30, three days after the first and only SAM firing. If this was true, it seems hardly likely that it was a change from the situation on October 27; it would not make sense for Soviets to turn over control of the SAM's to Cubans after a U-2 had been shot down and the Cubans had declared their intention to continue to defend their airspace with all available means, since this contradicted the inspection provisions that Khrushchev had offered without consulting Castro. In other words, this seems to imply very strongly that Cubans were capable of operating the SAM's and were manning them on October 27, and perhaps earlier, even if Russian officers were nominally in command.

It follows from this that Cuban personnel might have been in a position to fire a SAM at the U-2 on October 27, and that fighting at the Los Angeles site could have involved Russian efforts to prevent them from firing the SAM's rather than Cuban efforts to wrest control from the Russians. Castro would have a motive for denying this in public, as he has done to Tad Szulc, because Khrushchev had publically assured Kennedy that the SAM's, as well as the surface-to-surface missiles, were fully under the control of Soviets. If this was a lie, the Soviets may have induced Castro to protect their lie ever since.

The second assertion, however, is that the shootdown was by Cuban antiaircraft artillery. This could be a simple confusion of terms by Castro and Khrushchev, who says the same thing, a failure to distinguish between the rocketry of the SAM's and the antiaircraft artillery. But since they usually do make this distinction, it raises a question whether there might not be at least some confusion on the Cuban and Soviet side as to which type of weapon actually made the kill. It could even, astoundingly, be quite clear to them that it was in fact artillery that destroyed the U-2!

This could have arisen if a SAM, with a typical near-miss or distant miss, had somewhat damaged the U-2 and forced it to lower altitudes (something like this could have happened to Gary Powers in 1960: I don't believe we know for sure just what caused his plane finally to come apart). Antiaircraft artillery could then have destroyed the plane. Or artillerymen firing at the plane might believe that they were responsible for the destruction of the



plane; there might well be no way to have determined this with certainty at the time, either by Cubans, Soviets, or Americans (or Major Anderson, while he lived).

Looking at available accounts, one finds that SAC was for a prolonged period uncertain how the plane had been forced down, and even whether it had been attacked. According to Detzer, The Brink, p. 248, "SAC knew its U-2 plane was down, but at first was not sure why. They speculated that the plane might have malfunctioned, leading to 'pilot hyposxia' (oxygen deficiency). They did not, however, really think it was a malfunction. Anderson, they knew, had gone down near Banes, right next to a SAM site."

I am not aware on what basis SAC later based its assertion that the U-2 had been destroyed by a SAM. Perhaps they were able later to decipher telemetry that assured them that a SAM had been fired; but it would seem very unlikely that this would prove that the SAM had actually accomplished the destruction, as opposed to causing damage that forces the plane down to a level where antiaircraft artillery could hit it. Moreover, I doubt that telemetry would reveal destruction by artillery, assuming an absence of signals from the plane itself, which seems to be implied by SAC's initial uncertainty.

Anderson was hit about 10:15 Saturday morning, October 27, but that afternoon President Kennedy was still asking "for absolute verification that the U-2 was shot down and did not crash accidentally" (RFK, Thirteen Days, p. 76). And on the afternoon of October 29, Stevenson asked U Thant to use his good offices "to get the release, if he were still alive, of a Major Rudolph Anderson." (U Thant, p. 180. It was this inquiry that led Castro to tell U Thant that Cuban artillerymen had downed Major Anderson and that he had been killed.) In other words, two days later, there was this much uncertainty as to the fate of Anderson.

Could it be that the SAC conclusion that Anderson had been hit only by, or mainly damaged by, a SAM is based on nothing more than the fact that he went down near a SAM site--and perhaps that a SAM is known to have been fired then? Maybe artillerymen had reason to believe that it was their firing, in the end, that destroyed the plane--and maybe they were even right!

Who, then, ordered the firing of the SAM, assuming one was fired?

The fact is that no Soviet official has ever, to my knowledge, said even one of the following assertions, which were assumed to be true by virtually all members of the ExCom, without question, and which have scarcely been questioned by any analysts since (almost the only exceptions, mentioning other possibilities, though not Cuban control, are Detzer and Dinerstein):

1. The U-2 was shot down by a SAM.

2. The U-2 was shot down by Russians.
3. The U-2 was shot down on Khrushchev's orders.

I repeat: so far as I am aware, no Soviet official has ever asserted any of these propositions; on a number of occasions when Americans have made one or more of these statements to a Soviet official, no direct answer bearing on the claim is recorded.

Both Khrushchev and Davidkov, on the contrary, have made assertions contradicting 2 and 3; Castro has contradicted 1, 2 and 3, as has Khrushchev. These assertions, reported by U Thant, and Khrushchev in his memoirs, have simply been ignored in the literature; they don't even lead to speculation, questions raised, let alone refutation.

This is partly because it is taken for granted that Russians were in control of the SAMS--on the basis of Khrushchev's assertion publicly, and general assumption--although it is obvious that the Cubans were manning the systems within a week or so of the shootdown. Why not earlier? Moreover, Russians always obey orders, orders like this always come from the top, their puppet allies always do exactly what they're told, etc.: unlike US experience, or anyone else's in human history...

Stevenson - Secretary, 10/31/62

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Fast version of RFK to me, 1964: The content of what is in Thirteen Days (I don't recall this giving me any information on this episode when I read it in 1968) but with two additions:

I asked him if he had mentioned a deadline: he said yes, 48 hours. (This is somewhat at odds with his statement in the memoir that Soviets had to decide "by tomorrow." However, other sources, since, seem to say 48 hours. Anyway, that's what he said to me.

If they fired on one more recon plane, "Then the whole operation would commence right then; we would hit all the SAMs and probably the missiles as well; and probably invasion would follow." I said: "So they had 48 hours to decide, unless they shot one more

plane, in which case they could have it right away." "Yes."